Ecce Homo Moralis: How people care about doing the right thing beyond its monetary consequences

Thursday, 19 March 2020 – 1.30 PM

Seminar Room, Department of Economics and Management, Via Inama 5, Trento.

Speaker:
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Abstract

Decades of experimental research show that people often pay costs to help others, even in one-shot anonymous interactions, when no direct nor indirect reward seem to be at play. Standard theories of social preferences explain this pro-social attitude by assuming that people do not care only about their own payoff, but they also care about the payoff of others. In the past decade, however, this social preference framework has been challenged, as a number of experiments have shown that behavior in games such as the Dictator game, the Prisoner’s dilemma, the Ultimatum game, the Sender-Receiver game, and the Trade-Off game does not seem to be driven by social preferences, but it is best explained by general preferences for doing the right thing. According to this moral preference hypothesis, people care about doing what they think it is the right thing to do, beyond the economic consequences that this action brings about. In this talk, I will review the literature on this topic, with a special focus on recent developments and open problems.